

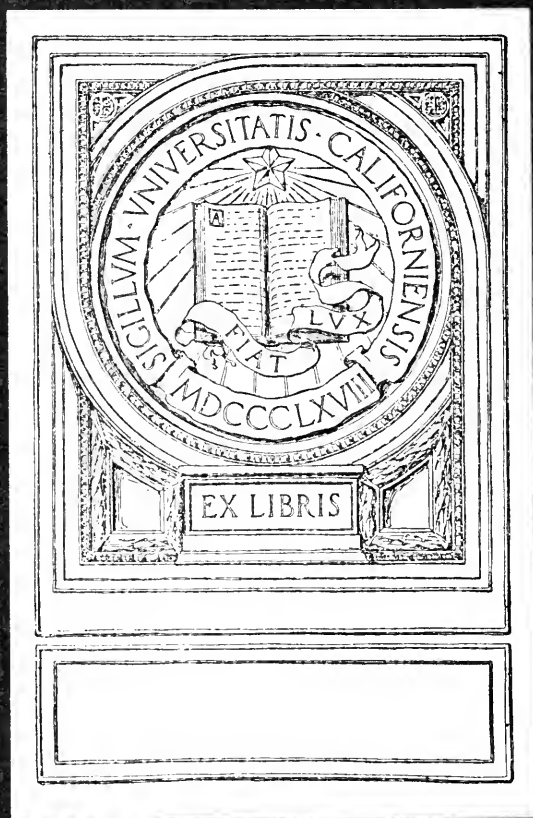
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PUBLICATIONS OF
THE WRITERS CLUB OF WASHINGTON

Vol. I. No. 1

In Memoriam

SVEN MAGNUS GRONBERGER

1866-1916

BY

G. R. BRIGHAM

WASHINGTON

1917

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TO MR. J. H. HARRIS
FROM MR. J. H. HARRIS
Very sincerely yours
L. H. HARRIS.

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IN MEMORIAM: SVEN MAGNUS GRONBERGER

By G. R. BRIGHAM

WITH the passing of Sven Magnus Gronberger The Writers Club of Washington lost a brilliant member whose interesting life and scholarly attainments it seeks to commemorate. So quietly and modestly he moved among us that few, even of his intimate friends, were fully aware of his erudition until he had left us.

Mr. Gronberger was born in Söderköping, Sweden, August 19, 1866, and died in Washington, April 24, 1916. He was the youngest son of the banker Rudolf Grönberger and his wife Antoinette. Sven Magnus, bearing the names of two medieval kings of Sweden, spent a happy childhood. In his earliest years he manifested a taste for natural history; indeed one of his first recollections was of being rescued by his mother when a child of between two and three years, as he was about to pick up a bright-colored snake in the garden. His parents were cultivated, literary people, his father being a follower of the American Unitarian idealist Theodore Parker, whose works he read with enthusiasm in a series of Swedish translations, which Sven well remembered; but when about thirty-three years of age the son embraced the Catholic faith. The mother was a linguist and enjoyed English and other classics, with which Sven, too, soon became familiar. He spoke of Thomas à Kempis as his mother's favorite religious author, whose great work he also read as a child.

Many examples of the boy's precocity are still recalled by his relatives in Sweden. At nine years he edited a little newspaper, which his brothers sold for him and which proved him to have been a good reporter. He was more studious than his companions, reading history, biology, geography, and other subjects in the school-room while they were bent on play; indeed so marked was this tendency that even then he was nicknamed "Professor." The boy observed animals, also, and maintained a kind of menagerie which his brothers collected for him. It was to his nephew, Mr.

Pelle Gronberger of Finnboda, Stockholm, son of one of these brothers, that Mr. Gronberger bequeathed his estate.

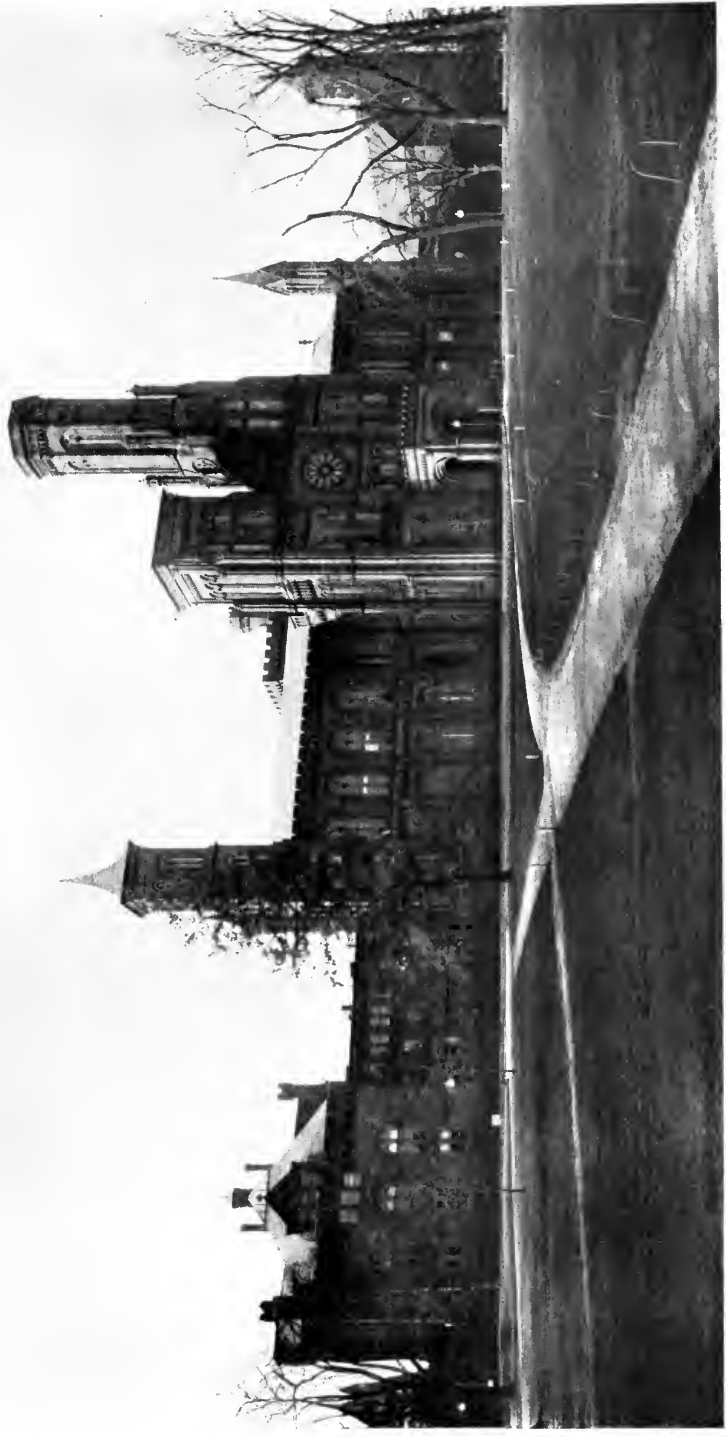
In 1884 Mr. Gronberger was graduated from the Gymnasium at Norrköping, an historic old city on the Baltic about seventy-five miles south of Stockholm, whose schools are said to be almost palatial. He then spent a year or two in study and work at Stockholm, and in 1886, having lost his parents, came to New York City. Here he first followed the profession of pharmacy, being an efficient chemist, but later turned to the law and was for some years in the offices of the late Judge Samuel T. Maddox of the Supreme Court of New York, who continued his friend and whose sudden demise in 1916 was a severe shock to him. In 1907 Mr. Gronberger accepted an appointment in the library of the Smithsonian Institution, where he rendered valued service as a translator, devoting his spare moments to study and writing. His apartment in G Street, nearly opposite the buildings of George Washington University, typified the scholar by its almost bare simplicity. His "great library," as he considered it, was in his office at the Smithsonian Institution, the walls almost hidden by books. He was about to receive the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from George Washington University, with topics Zoölogy and Geology, on which subjects he had issued several papers, though his more important contributions were awaiting publication.

Mr. Gronberger was an accomplished linguist, being familiar with the Scandinavian tongues, including some Icelandic, and was also versed in French, English, German, and Italian, besides Latin and Greek, and their literatures. French he knew perfectly, since it was his home language as a member of the Swedish aristocracy; indeed he always spoke it by preference, and usually made it the medium of his journals. For a number of years he made a special study of zoölogical parks as a factor in popularizing natural science, and in this pursuit the Bronx Zoölogical Park of New York and the National Zoölogical Park at Washington became subjects of his special attention. Mr. Gronberger was a member of the Biological Society of Washington, the Anthropological Society of Washington, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Ornithologists' Union, the Audubon Society, the Scandinavian Society of America, and The Writers Club of Washington.

Mr. Gronberger wrote an exhaustive monograph on "The

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Palæarctic Birds of Greenland," the first thorough study of the subject that had been attempted. This work, which occupied several years of investigation, is a review of the occurrence of European and Asiatic species in Greenland and neighboring islands from the middle of the eighteenth century, and was intended to be offered, after revision, as his doctorate thesis at George Washington University.

A study of "Birds near Washington" was published in 1911 in *Forest and Stream*, and various other minor articles on natural history subjects appeared in that magazine and in *The Auk*, *The Fishing Gazette*, and in other biological and sportsman periodicals. An entertaining series of papers, which appeared in *Forest and Stream*, was the outcome of Mr. Gronberger's controversy with Mr. Walter Winans over the presence of the aurochs, an almost extinct European bison, in Count Potocki's game preserve in Poland. Two important articles translated by him and published in the Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution, were Nathorst's "Carl von Linné as a Geologist," and Peter Kalm's description of the Passenger Pigeon published in 1759, republished from *The Auk*.

A memoir on "The Origin of the Goths," probably to be published in Stockholm, deals with the Gothic migration from Scandza, or Scandinavia, as described by Jordanes, with the correlative evidence of a celebrated runic inscription in Sweden. The result of this study was presented before the Anthropological Society of Washington in 1914, and was summarized in the *American Anthropologist* for January-March of that year.

Another recent study was that of the Batrachia of the District of Columbia, the result of much research and field observation with friends of the scientific staff of the National Museum. A brief report of it, by Mr. Gronberger, appeared in *Copeia* in 1915. He was still engaged in this investigation at the time of his final illness, making the last field excursion less than a month before his death.

Mr. Gronberger left also a life of the religious mystic "Saint Bridget [Birgitta, Brigitta] of Sweden," based on the best historical sources, including the *Acta Sanctorum*. Of this extended study, he wrote, "I am intensely interested in this subject, having visited the Saint's Convent Church in Vadstena, Sweden, and in the same place viewed her remains which were carried by Brigittine monks

from Italy across the continent of Europe, A. D. 1373 or 1374." Dr. James J. Walsh, of New York City, arranged for the publication of this interesting memoir in the *American Catholic Quarterly Review* for January, 1917, with an introductory sketch of the author by Dr. Walsh. A more extended account of Mr. Gronberger's life, by the same writer, was published in *Ave Maria*, November 18 and 25, 1916.

Mr. Gronberger's address on "Modern Swedish Literature" was delivered before The Writers Club of Washington on January 6, 1916. The occasion was a happy one, and the speaker was not only characteristically witty, but he illumined his paper with remarks on the personal traits and surroundings of some of the literary lights of his native land in the later years of the nineteenth century. That he enjoyed the meetings of the club is shown by a letter, addressed by him to one of its members, dated February 9th, in which he wrote, "We had a charming time at Mrs. S——'s home, and I think K—— did very well. [Mr. K—— had reviewed the life and works of Ibsen.] These 'Writers Club' affairs are exceedingly interesting and delightful to me." On the occasion of Mr. Gronberger's address, he proposed as a subject for the effort of the members, an interpretation of the title and refrain of a poem by Malmström, "Why does the forest sigh so deeply?" One of the young literati at a subsequent meeting offered a reply, which met Mr. Gronberger's favorable criticism.

He had a deep poetic sense, often tending toward the melancholy, as expressed by Gray's lines (which seem almost prophetic in his case), copied into his journal of 1908:

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that Beauty, all that Wealth e'er gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

While engaged in a study of the leeches of the District of Columbia, a task imposed by one of his college professors, which gave his friends much amusement, one of them sent Mr. Gronberger a copy of Wordsworth's poem, "The Leech-Gatherer" (better known as "Resolution and Independence"), from which he culled the lines, found in his journal for May 1, 1915:

"We poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness."

He had written verse himself, and about 1910 was considering a popular translation of Ovid's "Metamorphoses," of which a fragment of the old Babylonian legend of Pyramus and Thisbe, "star-crossed" lovers like Romeo and Juliet, is preserved:

"Pyramus and Thisbe, the first-named a most beauteous youth,
The latter the most favored of the Orient's daughters,
Lived in neighboring houses in the lofty old city
Which Semiramis girdled with burnt brick walls.

"Proximity fosters acquaintance and the first lingering steps of affection;
Time ripens their love; and they would be united in wedlock,
But the parents forbade.

What they could not forbid, however,
Was the mutual love which inflamed their equally amorous senses;
They remain in oblivion to the outer world: they converse in nods and
in whispers;
The more their love's fire is covered and quenched, the more fiercely it
burns under cover."

A glimpse of his wide reading and a suggestion of his critical faculty are gained from various random notes left by him.

"The 'French Revolution' of Carlyle [whom he characterizes as a great literary charlatan] is simply preposterous, as every one knows, and the exorbitant praise bestowed upon it is that of the dilettante *vulgar* which praises everything to the skies which it does not understand."

Again—

"Wasn't the Renaissance rather a rebirth, a reawakening, a return to old ideals? The perceptions seem to be old, instead of new. But then, what is old is new, and what is new is old, hence the antinomy. What would become of all our human discussions if we were fully aware of this fact?"

His study of the expressiveness of various languages led him to write: "English is bungling, imperfect and mongrel, as compared, for instance, with the French only."

Familiarity with the leading American writers brought forth some interesting and spirited criticisms:

"Have you ever read Poe's 'Spirit (or Principle) of Poetry'? It is great. . . . Poe is the one American writer or poet really recognized throughout civilized Europe to have been a *great and original genius*."

"Strange to say, I am not an admirer of Hawthorne—he was too sectional; but perhaps this was his greatness. Maybe I do not know him enough. In the 'Scarlet Letter,' H. harps too much on a single theme, and it becomes monotonous, to me at least. Give me Washington Irving for artistic creation!"

"R. L. Stevenson was, according to my way of thinking, an elegant trifler, wrote very entertaining stories full of local Scotch color, and makes good reading, but I do not admire his style—it is careless; he and Conan Doyle are of the same ilk. Both greatly overrated."

The following jottings reflect Mr. Gronberger's interest in the humanities and the subtle enjoyment he derived from his literary studies:

"Do not take Demosthenes as the only sample of an orator. Look at Byron, for instance—he must have been 'mouthing' in his cradle."

"Charles I. was not 'monstrous' (like Henry VIII), he simply had the bee of the divinity of kings buzzing in his bonnet. As a man he had many admirable traits, and his martyrdom has rendered him almost a saint in the eyes of posterity."

"We are all 'romancers,' sure enough, whether we are poets or not. I believe 'romancing' to be one of the most ancient accomplishments of the human race; but by the very fact of its being so common, the imputation is fiercely resented when howled into a man's face."

"A poem, if it is 'amusing,' ceases to be sublime, and therefore loses much of its essence. That is, of course, the case in romantic and lyric poetry. I do not speak of 'comic poetry,' which is simply 'verses,' not poetry."

"The Goths held woman in high esteem, hence the later Romans had occasion to be ashamed of themselves."

Mr. Gronberger had in view much further research and writing, as is indicated by various fugitive memoranda—studies of birds of eastern North America and the Batrachia of the District of Columbia, dynamic geology, zoölogical laboratory, and the emendation of his manuscript on the birds of Greenland. Further insight into his varied interests is shown by his intention to present an address before the Anthropological Society of Washington on Latin and Teutonic stems, and to "take up for consideration, comparative anatomy of vertebrates, higher mammals, including man; history and philosophy of zoölogy."

He passed away on the morning of Easter Monday and was

buried from Saint Dominic's Church on the following Wednesday. Interment was in Mount Olivet cemetery.

Thus is the brief record of a quiet scholar whose tendency throughout life was to acquire knowledge in many fields rather than to exploit it. Although a man of unusual reserve, his learning became manifest even on short acquaintance, and respect for his erudition grew more profound as one penetrated the modesty that shrouded his nature. As a great man of science said of him, "He impressed me as a shy, modest man, but one whose learning was sound; a very rare sort of person and exactly the kind of man I like to know, but very seldom find."

RESOLUTIONS BY THE WRITERS CLUB OF WASHINGTON, ADOPTED
JUNE 1, 1916

WHEREAS, on April twenty-fourth, Nineteen Sixteen, Death let fall his sword and took from our midst one of our members, Sven M. Gronberger, it is hereby

Resolved that we, THE WRITERS CLUB, express our sorrow at the loss of our fellow member, who was not only a cultivated gentleman but a man of scientific attainments. Closer acquaintance with him revealed a mind and heart of sweetness and sympathy, as well as a nature that appreciated keenly a joke, whether on himself or on another. THE WRITERS CLUB will miss the companionship of one who doubtless would have proved of great service to its members, as his splendid education in the languages of Europe and his individual writing and research would have rendered his opinions and advice well worthy of acceptance.

Be it further resolved that these resolutions be made a part of the records of THE WRITERS CLUB and that a copy thereof be sent to the relatives of Mr. Gronberger in Sweden.

MARY B. C. SHUMAN,
President

C. A. KNUDTSON,
Vice President

Notices of the life and death of Mr. Gronberger appear in the following newspapers and periodicals:

Washington Post, April 25, 1916.

Washington Herald, April 25, 1916.

University Hatchet, George Washington University, April 28, 1916.

- American Anthropologist*, vol. 18, no. 2, Apr.-June 1916.
Science, vol. 43, no. 1118, June 2, 1916.
The Auk, vol. XXXIII, no. 3, July 1916.
Ave Maria, vol. 4, nos. 21, 22, Nov. 18 and 25, 1916.
The American Catholic Quarterly Review, vol. XLII, no. 165, Jan. 1917.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SVEN MAGNUS GRONBERGER

- 1909 Carl von Linné as a Geologist, by A. G. Nathorst. Translated by S. M. Gronberger. Published, condensed, in *Ann. Rep. Smithsonian Institution for 1908*, pp. 711-743. Washington, 1909. (Issued also separately, Pub. no. 1912.)
- 1911 Birds near Washington. *Forest and Stream*, vol. 76, no. 18, New York, May 6, 1911.
 More respect for the American flag. *Washington Times*, Oct. 27, 1911.
 The Passenger Pigeon, by Peter Kalm (1759) and John James Audubon (1831). Translated by S. M. Gronberger from Kongl. Vetenskaps-Akademiens Handlingar, för år 1759, vol. 20, Stockholm, 1759. *The Auk*, vol. 28, Cambridge, Mass., Jan. 1911. Reprinted in *Ann. Rep. Smithsonian Institution for 1911*, pp. 407-424, colored plate, Washington, 1912. (Issued also separately.)
- 1912 Starlings. *Forest and Stream*, vol. 78, no. 6, New York, Feb. 10, 1912.
 Praise for the Starling. *Idem*, vol. 78, no. 11, Mar. 1912.
- 1913 Hedgehogs. *Idem*, vol. 81, no. 2, July 12, 1913.
- 1914 Reproduction and Spawning Places of the Common Eel. *Fishing Gazette*, vol. 31, no. 25, New York, June 20, 1914. ("A condensation of the work of Dr. Jules Schmidt of Sweden. In the opinion of Dr. Theodore Gill and other eminent ichthyologists this is the 'last word' on the subject with which it deals.")
- Winans matter: An open letter. *Forest and Stream*, vol. 82, no. 24, New York, June 13, 1914.
 [Reply by Mr. Winans, titled "Walter Winans makes a Correction." *Idem*, vol. 83, no. 3, July 18, 1914.]
 A Reply to Mr. Winans. *Idem*, vol. 83, no. 8, Aug. 22, 1914.
- 1915 On a Small Collection of Frogs and Toads of the District of Columbia. *Copeia*, no. 24, New York, Nov. 19, 1915.
- 1917 St. Bridget of Sweden, A Chapter of Mediæval Church History. *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, vol. XLII, no. 165, pp. 97-148, Philadelphia, Jan. 1917. (Issued also separately.)

[In manuscript]

- The Palæarctic Birds of Greenland. (A review of the occurrence of European and Asiatic species in Greenland and the neighboring islands from the middle of the eighteenth century to the present time. A study approximating 600 typewritten pages.)
- The Origin of the Goths. (A report dealing with the Gothic migration from

Scandza, or Scandinavia, as described by Jordanes, with the corroborating evidence of a celebrated runic inscription in Sweden. About 50 typewritten pages. Presented before the Anthropological Society of Washington in 1911, and reviewed in *American Anthropologist* (n.s.), vol. 16, no. 1, Lancaster, Pa., Jan.-Mar. 1914. Probably to be published in Sweden.)

The Batrachia of the District of Columbia. (A study on which the author was engaged at the time of his demise, a preliminary report of which is cited from *Copeia*.)

The European Hedgehog. (An article of 10 typewritten pages, with 2 photographs.)

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